

safe return amnesty committee

A message from Daniel Ellsberg:

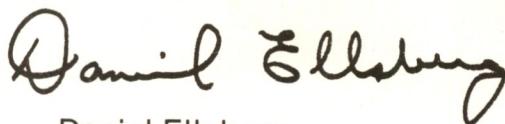
The recent disclosure of portions of the White House transcripts reveal what many of us have known for some time; that Richard Nixon went to extraordinary lengths to shield himself and his associates from prosecution for their offenses against our Constitution. Yet, for tens of thousands of young men who resisted the Indochina war, he hasn't shown one ounce of compassion nor understanding. Last year, he said; "those who deserted must pay their price . . . a criminal penalty for disobeying the law."

I know from my own experience and that of others, that the decision to resist further participation in the Indochina war often followed a long and painful period of deliberation on the obligation of an American citizen to refuse collaboration in a war conceived and carried out in violation of both U.S. and international law. The decision to resist has been a costly one for thousands of young Americans. They've been jailed in federal prisons, forced to live underground or in exile and denied jobs and veterans' benefits. Today, there are literally hundreds of thousands of draft resisters, military deserters and Vietnam era vets with "bad" discharges, whose futures depend significantly on our ability to win a just amnesty.

While our country grapples with the legacy of Watergate lawlessness and the complicity of our highest leaders, few acts would do more to right past wrongs than the declaration of a universal, unconditional amnesty for all war resisters. Such an amnesty, of course, will not be easily obtained. President Nixon and his allies have millions of our tax dollars at their disposal to combat the movement for amnesty. SAFE RETURN, the organization in the forefront of the drive for universal amnesty, has only your support on which to rely in this difficult fight. It's essential that they intensify efforts in the coming months.

SAFE RETURN needs your support now. It's crucial that you contribute as generously as you can; the futures of nearly one million young men depend on it. Please return the enclosed envelope with your contribution to SAFE RETURN today.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Daniel Ellsberg". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Daniel" and last name "Ellsberg" clearly legible.

Daniel Ellsberg

a word about safe return

We're a national committee with the objective of winning a universal, no-strings amnesty for all categories of war resisters. We've developed several different strategies for advancing this campaign.

SAFE RETURN recently launched Campaign '74, a national program to insure that the question of amnesty is a central issue in every Congressional race this year. Local committees will poll all candidates—regardless of party affiliation—as to their position on amnesty. In many districts, discussion and debate with the candidate will be an important part of the polling process. SAFE RETURN will supply educational materials on amnesty to be used locally. Where candidates are reluctant to declare their position on amnesty, we will publicize this fact. When a candidate declares his or her support for universal amnesty, the local Campaign '74 committee will attempt to publicize that position as broadly as possible. This should generate pressure on the competing candidates to speak out and to further educate the electorate on the issue.

On the legislative front, we've organized two Ad Hoc Congressional Hearings for Unconditional Amnesty in the last year. A panel of lawmakers, chaired by Congresswoman Bella Abzug, heard testimony from family members of resisters. The families spoke to the human cost of resistance, and their sons and brothers' need for a just amnesty. At the second session, co-chaired by Congressman John Conyers, Vietnam veterans who had received "bad discharges" as a result of their opposition to the war and racist conditions in the military were heard. SAFE RETURN representatives testified at the Kastenmeier Committee's hearings in March, 1974. We also provide a regular distribution of amnesty materials to all members of Congress and assist family members to lobby with their individual Congressmen.

SAFE RETURN has sponsored the public surrender of five Vietnam veterans who have refused further military service out of opposition to the Vietnam war. All had lived for several years either underground or in exile. Most recently, Lewis Simon and Edward McNally returned to military control after their dramatic appearance at a SAFE RETURN homecoming reception. We waged a vigorous defense campaign for them based on their duty to refuse to execute criminal military policies in Indochina, and we will continue to advise resisters who decide to return to military control.

We also provide speakers for public events and debates; publish materials relevant to amnesty; and act as a clearinghouse for people seeking suggestions and ideas on implementing local amnesty work.

FORA, Families of Resisters for Amnesty, has been organized with the aid of SAFE RETURN. Several thousand families are already conducting petitioning and letter writing campaigns, distributing resister bracelets, and in some communities, working on local electoral referendums on amnesty.

endorsers

U.S. Rep. Bella S. Abzug
David Amram
Martin Balsam
Clive Barnes
Robert & Francis Boehm
Julian Bond
Leonard Boudin
Noam Chomsky

U.S. Rep. John Conyers
Joan Crowell
Ossie Davis
Ruby Dee
U.S. Rep. Ronald Dellums
Helen Gahagan Douglas
Thomas Emerson
Richard Falk
Jules Feiffer
Ben Gazzara
Dick Gregory

Hon. Ernest Gruening
Joseph Heller
Nat Hentoff
Myrna Lamb
Marilyn Langner
Paul Leaf
Kevin McCarthy
Rev. Paul Mayer, S.J.
U.S. Rep. Parren Mitchell
Paul O'Dwyer
Patrick O'Neal

Otto Preminger
Rabbi Sally Priesand
Muriel Rukeyser
Nora Sayre
I.F. Stone
Beatrice Straight
William Styron
Paul Sweezy
Peter Weiss
Gene Wilder
Peter Yarrow

The Washington Post

Amnesty Proponents

Plan New Drive

By William Claiborne
Washington Post Staff Writer

Abe Simon, a blunt-speaking New York printing shop operator who proudly recalls his experiences as an Army tank crewman during the Battle of the Bulge, exploded in rage when his oldest son deserted from the Army in 1968 in protest of the Vietnam war.

Lewis Simon, an intense young man with a master's degree in linguistics, had just completed a three-week Christmas leave from the Army. Instead of returning to Fort Devens,

Mass., he boarded a plane at New York and fled to Stockholm, Sweden.

"I remember thinking, 'Oh, my God, he can never come back,'" the elder Simon recalls. And there were times, the father said, when he didn't really care.

That was five years ago. Lewis Simon returned home last Christmas and surrendered to the FBI.

Today, he is in the stockade at Fort Dix, N.J., facing years of prison and a dishonorable discharge for fleeing to a life in exile rather than serve in the Army.

His once anguished father has become a radical, of sorts, joining an increasingly vocal lobby for amnesty for Vietnam war era deserters.

But the conflict between Simon's love for his son and the 62-year-old veteran's traditional values of patriotism and respect for authority shows occasionally as he talks about his new-found cause.

"Deep down, I feel that if our country really was in danger from invasion, these young boys wouldn't hesitate to fight," Simon said in a recent interview.

"They wanted to express their opposition to what they considered to be an illegal, immoral war. It is only the actions of these boys that brought home the inhumanity of our involvement in this war," he added.

"You might say, 'Who the hell are they to decide which war to fight in?'" Simon suggested. "Okay, I agree, but this war was nothing like World War II. It affected the moral health of our society."

Abe Simon, a member of the New York-based Safe Return Amnesty Committee, is part of that consciousness-altering campaign.

Safe Return Amnesty Committee officials claim that 521,000 U.S. soldiers had deserted by mid-1972 and that the moral erosion caused by an unpopular war either directly or indirectly caused virtually all of them to become fugitives rather than serve in the armed forces.

The Safe Return group adds to these another half million military personnel who received less-than-honorable discharges during the Vietnam era and some 12,000 Selective Service draft resisters who have been indicted, and comes up with more than 1 million men who could be eligible for amnesty of some form.

Michael Uhl, of Safe Return, concedes that the total includes GIs whose desertion could not even be remotely connected to war opposition in a legal sense.

"Sure, a couple of bad apples will sneak in with the majority. But these guys were caught up in a war that was brutally illegal," he said.

"Whether they understood all the implications is not really important," Uhl adds. "We're talking in the context of the Vietnam war, which so many Americans rejected in the comfort of their living rooms. These guys were victims of the war, even though they can't prove they deserted because of the war."

Monday, March 4, 1974

FRIDAY, JUNE 21, 1974

New York Post

Amnesty and the Candidates

Candidates or Congress this fall can expect some heat from parents of Vietnam-era war resisters who want unconditional amnesty for their sons, the Safe Return Amnesty Committee has warned.

October 12 has been designated "Candidate/Amnesty Day" on the East. As hopefuls beat the campaign trail that day, they will be trailed by motorcades emblazoned with banners and pro-amnesty placards. At each stop, members of Families of Resisters for Amnesty (FORA) plan to interrupt handshaking and baby-kissing with questions they hope will pin down waffling politicians.

Hopefuls in the city, Westchester, northern New Jersey and six other urban areas are targeted.

West Coast candidates will get the treatment Oct. 19.

"The same mentality that got us mired in Vietnam gave us Watergate," said Tod Ensign, a founder of Safe Return. "The constant lying, the mania to protect 'national security.'" Unconditional amnesty, he feels, "can turn that mentality around."

FORA members have been conducting a poll of members of Congress. They report that 43 per cent of respondents favor amnesty on a case-by-case review basis.

with public service required as a condition for return. Ensign calls that waffling. He says it would lead to review boards that favor better-educated, better-off men and penalize those who can't verbalize or can't afford a lawyer to speak for them.

The FORA poll shows 16.5 per cent against any amnesty and 8 per cent for unconditional amnesty. Five and a half per cent favor amnesty only for draft resisters.

"The issue is emotional," Ensign says. "Most people try to make petty distinctions. They forget that these aren't battle-field desertions because of cowardice. Most men left before getting to Vietnam or from hospitals or rest and recreation periods.

"Pretty soon you'll be talking about how many consciences can dance on the head of a pin," he said.

Ensign points to amnesties granted by Portugal's new government to political prisoners and Australia's pardon of Vietnam-era draft resisters as portents. He hopes an amnesty can be declared here before the Bicentennial.

He charges that Congress is going slow because members haven't been able to take the pulse of the nation on the question. The FORA demonstration hopes to rekindle public debate.